

# **Southern Plains Network**

## **Biological Inventory and Vital Signs Monitoring Program**

### **CHARTER**

#### **I. Background and Purpose**

This charter describes the process used to plan, manage, and evaluate the biological inventory and monitoring (I&M) program within the Southern Plains (SOPL) Network in accordance with the intent and purpose of the National Park Service (NPS) Natural Resource Challenge (NRC). The NRC strategy requires the development of an integrated monitoring program that includes short-term tactical monitoring as well as long-term monitoring.

The biological I&M program will provide scientifically sound information for managing park resources and informing the public. Such information will allow managers to confront and mitigate threats to the parks and operate more effectively in regulatory, legal, and political arenas. The program will develop broadly based, scientifically sound information on the current status and long-term trends in the composition, structure and function of park ecosystems.

In an October 13, 2000 memorandum, the Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, outlined the vision and implementation plan for vital signs monitoring in parks and networks (Attachment A). This NPS strategy implementing the Natural Resource Challenge includes the creation of 32 park networks linked by geography and shared natural resource characteristics. The networks will facilitate collaboration, information sharing, and economies of scale in natural resource management. Each network will receive approximately 8-9 new positions, supplemented by additional positions for air and water quality monitoring where appropriate, and a set amount of funding each year to develop a core program for park vital signs monitoring. Parks in each network will share these positions and funds. The level of funding available will not allow comprehensive monitoring in all parks, but will provide parks with a foundation for natural resource monitoring that can be built upon through future efforts. This program will be leveraged with additional personnel and funding from other sources to build a successful inventory and long-term monitoring program.

The SOPL Network is comprised of 11 park units in the states of Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. All of the parks are located in the Intermountain Region (IMR) with the exception of Fort Larned National Historic Site, which is located in the Midwest Region (MWR).

<b><i>Southern Plains Network</i></b>	Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (BEOL) Capulin Volcano National Monument (CAVO) Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CHIC) Fort Larned National Historic Site (FOLS) Fort Union National Monument (FOUN) Lake Meredith National Recreation Area (LAMR) Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument (ALFL) Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park (LYJO) Pecos National Historical Park (PECO) Sand Creek National Historic Site (SACR) Washita Battlefield National Historic Site (WABA)
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A Study Plan for Biological Inventories, which directs the multi-year inventory effort in the SOPL, was completed in November 2000. Inventory funding is provided through the NRC. Inventory efforts have been coordinated by representatives of SOPL parks under the guidance of the IMR I&M Coordinator. Two park representatives share the SOPL Network Coordinator function on a collateral duty basis.

The purpose of this charter is to define how the SOPL Network is organized to carry out an exemplary I&M Program.

## II. Organization and Responsibilities

A multi-level organizational structure will ensure the effectiveness of the SOPL I&M Program. The organization is comprised of a Board of Directors, Technical Committee, Scientific Panels, and Network Staff.

### ***Board of Directors (BOD)***

The SOPL Board of Directors provides *guidance, oversight* and *advocacy* toward development and implementation of the I&M Program for 11 park units within the network.

*Major responsibilities of the BOD are as follows:*

- Approve the five-year strategic plan and review it annually.
- Promote accountability by reviewing progress and quality control for the network.
- Review and approve program budgets.
- Review and approve hiring and work plans developed by the Technical Committee.
- Review network charter every three years.
- Provide oversight for NEPA/NHPA compliance and research permits.
- Hold annual BOD meeting.
- Plan, establish and manage the Leeper House Learning Center for the SOPL Network
- Advocate an active and effective I&M Program in the network.
- Decide on strategies for leveraging network funds and personnel to best accomplish the natural resource inventory, long-term monitoring, and other needs of network parks.

- Provide input to supervisor of the Technical Committee Chairperson for performance appraisals.
- Ensure that the network work is integrated with park resource management programs and other NPS natural resource funding initiatives.
- Facilitate communication and coordination about network activities with park managers in the network and region. Serve as liaison to Cluster Leadership Councils and Natural Resource Communication Advisory Team.
- Identify and develop internal and external partnerships to further the goals of the NRC and I&M Program.

*Membership.* The BOD represents Superintendents from the 11 parks within the SOPL, and should reflect the diversity in size and character of the network parks. The membership of the BOD includes three superintendents, who shall serve three-year terms. Additional members shall include a resource manager or, in the case of a park that does not have a resource manager, a representative designated by the superintendent. All resource managers shall serve two-year terms. The terms of each superintendent and resource manager shall begin on January 1 of any given year and end on December 31. The terms of the superintendents and resource managers are initially staggered to achieve the desired rotation; these terms are delineated in Attachment B.

Additional members of the BOD are the SOPL Network Coordinator and the IMR I&M Coordinator. To facilitate coordination with Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESU), the unit leaders from the Rocky Mountain, Great Plains and Desert Southwest CESUs are designated as ex-officio members. There will be no officers of the BOD. A park superintendent shall serve as the chair and will be elected by the BOD. The chair will be elected for a one-year term.

*Procedures.* The BOD will foster an atmosphere of professionalism and cooperation throughout the SOPL Network. It will operate in an atmosphere of fairness, trust, and respect. Procedural and reporting requirements are coordinated at the network level adhering to guidelines established by the WASO I&M program. The SOPL Network Coordinator facilitates meetings and communications to BOD members.

Formal BOD meetings will occur annually. Additionally, three members of the BOD can jointly request meetings of the BOD. Formal meetings require distribution of a written agenda at least two weeks before the meeting. At the end of each meeting, members of the BOD responsible for arranging the logistics and agenda for the next meeting will be designated. Network members are welcome to attend any meeting. Any BOD member may call telephone conference meetings. Electronic mail messages will provide information to all members and resolve simple matters.

Any BOD member who cannot attend or otherwise participate in a BOD meeting may assign an alternate. A BOD member cannot serve as the alternate, or carry the proxy for an absent member. Four BOD members constitute a quorum. Ex-officio members may designate an alternate if desired.

The BOD shall strive for consensus decision. Consensus is defined as an outcome that all BOD members can live with if not ideal from any one viewpoint. When consensus decisions cannot be reached, a majority vote would be sufficient. In case of a tie vote, the BOD will table the

issue at hand and the three superintendents will poll all network superintendents. A majority vote of the network superintendents shall decide the issue at hand. Superintendents representing more than one park unit will be allotted one vote.

Recommendations will identify the responsible individual(s) and deadlines as appropriate. Meeting minutes will be distributed to BOD members, the SOPL superintendents, the Technical Committee and the SOPL Network staff.

### ***Technical Committee (TC)***

The SOPL Technical Committee is responsible for developing the specific I&M program plans, budgets and hiring proposals that are presented to the BOD for review and approval. Where the BOD has responsibility for approval of program goals on a broad scale, the TC is responsible for the detailed technical formulation and execution of the program. The TC is accountable to the BOD for all activities and products.

*Major responsibilities of the TC are as follows:*

- Prepare a five-year strategic plan for BOD review and approval.
- Compile and summarize existing information about park resources.
- Host scoping workshops and other outreach efforts as needed to develop the Network monitoring plan.
- Solicit professional guidance, from scientific panel members, individuals, and other organizations, as needed.
- Prepare proposals for hiring network staff for BOD review and approval.
- Prepare annual network I&M accomplishment report and work plan for BOD review and approval.
- Develop network vital signs monitoring plan (long-term and annual plans) for BOD review and approval.
- Develop and foster partnerships that support overall I&M objectives.
- Organize and facilitate periodic program reviews.
- Integrate environmental compliance activities, as required by federal law and NPS policy, into the development of study plans and the park project approval process.
- Work with park staff in areas such as cultural resources or interpretation to build support for an integrated I&M program.
- Ensure that the network work is fully integrated with park resource management programs and other NPS natural resource funding initiatives.

*Membership.* The TC is comprised of a representative from each park in the SOPL Network and the SOPL Network Coordinator. Park superintendents will appoint representatives. They will serve on the TC until the appointing official designates a new member.

*Procedures.* The TC will meet in person two times a year, which may include the annual BOD meeting. These meetings will be supplemented by conference calls as necessary. The resource manager currently serving on the BOD chairs the TC. The chair will serve a two-year term. Serving as the TC Chair will represent a substantial commitment of time and effort, which should be reflected as a critical element in the performance standards for the TC Chair.

The SOPL Network Coordinator will assist the TC chair in scheduling and organizing meetings. Five TC members constitute a quorum. TC meetings are open to all interested park staff and BOD members. It is the goal that all decisions are made by consensus. Where this is not feasible, a majority vote will be used as an alternate means of arriving at a decision. Meeting notes will document all committee decisions for circulation to the TC members and the BOD.

### ***Scientific Panels***

Scientific panels assist the network with planning for vital signs monitoring and provide scientific peer review. Panels will be appointed as needed and configured to address scientific topics and issues, which will be stated at the time of the panel's establishment. Panels may vary in size and length of service. Scientific panel members represent key disciplines (biological, physical, etc.) and may include scientists from the USGS-Biological Resource Division, academic institutions and other relevant organizations. Panel members should have knowledge of sampling procedures, monitoring techniques and statistical methods in order to evaluate conceptual designs, monitoring strategies and the ecological relevance of monitoring proposals.

The primary purpose of the scientific panels will be to provide guidance to the TC in the design and implementation of inventory projects and vital signs monitoring. It is expected that the CESUs will help facilitate linkages with the local scientific community. Meetings with panel members will be scheduled as needed. The SOPL Network Coordinator will facilitate and chair panel meetings. The products and recommendations of the scientific panels will be presented to the BOD for review and final approval.

### ***Network Staff***

Staffing the SOPL Network is limited by funding realities. Current and projected funding requires the SOPL Network to work with reduced staffing. Presently the SOPL Network does not have any permanent staff. A fully funded network I&M program is envisioned to have a staff of 8 to 9 FTEs; this level of staffing may materialize several years in the future. Some of these positions will likely be housed in a central network location and others will be stationed in individual parks. Details of staffing needs, including supervision and duty stations, will be addressed in the network monitoring plan and approved by the BOD.

The SOPL Network Coordinator works to support the BOD and TC in meeting the goals of the I&M Program for the Network. In addition to serving on the BOD and TC, the Network Coordinator will chair any scientific panels that are established. The Network Coordinator will be responsible for many of the administrative and communication functions of the Network.

Other critical staff for the SOPL Network includes a data manager, applied scientists and technicians for monitoring the physical environment. As the SOPL I&M program develops, these positions will be established to adapt to the growing needs of the Network.

### ***Other Ad-hoc and Standing Committees***

The BOD may form ad-hoc or standing committees to guide SOPL Network activities or implement SOPL Network projects. An Information and Education Committee comprised of interpretation, education, and public affairs staff may be formed at a later date.

## **III. Network Operations**

*Administrative Costs.* In addition to the guidance provided by the “Vision and Implementation Plan” for vital signs monitoring, the SOPL Network will use the guidance provided in the November 30, 2001 memorandum regarding administrative policies from the Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (Attachment C). Administrative costs for personnel, administrative support and services, office space and equipment, and vehicles will be borne by the SOPL I&M program only as provided for in this memorandum or superseding guidance.

*Strategic Plan.* A five-year strategic plan covering the scope and goals of the SOPL Network I&M program will be developed by the TC and approved by the BOD no later than October 2004. It is important that the SOPL Strategic Plan be linked to the strategic plans of the individual parks in the SOPL Network. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually by the BOD and revised as needed. It is the basis for the Annual Work Plan. In fiscal years 2002-2004 the Network will operate without an approved strategic plan.

*Annual Work Plan.* Working with the SOPL Network Coordinator, the SOPL TC will present a proposed Annual Work Plan to the BOD for review and approval no later than September 15 of each year. The Annual Work Plan will assign specific accomplishments and products, responsible individuals, deadlines, and fiscal resources to parks or offices in furtherance of the strategic plan. Final funding allocations will be added to the Annual Work Plan once a budget for the SOPL Network is authorized. The BOD must approve substantial changes to the Annual Work Plan.

*Annual Accomplishment Report.* Working with the SOPL Network Coordinator, the SOPL TC will present an Annual Accomplishment Report to the BOD for review and final approval no later than September 15 of each year. The Annual Accomplishment Report will provide details on specific accomplishments and products, lessons learned, collaborative activities supported by alternate funding sources, and a budget summary. A detailed accounting of all I&M funds assigned to each park and office will be appended to the report. This report will be widely distributed. The Annual Accomplishment Report will be released no later than October 31 of each year. The report format will conform to WASO reporting requirements. The Network Coordinator will distribute copies of the report to the IMR, WASO and other interested parties.

*Program Review.* Beginning at the end of fiscal year 2009 and every five years thereafter, the Network will conduct a comprehensive program review by national and regional NPS specialists, as well as qualified independent specialists from other agencies and organizations. The purpose of this review will be to evaluate accomplishments and products, protocols used for gathering data, data management, fiscal management, and staffing. The Program Review will be the basis for any significant changes in program direction as well as reassignment of fiscal and staff resources.

In addition to this comprehensive review, the TC will conduct a review of the inventory work completed under the auspices of the *Study Plan for Biological Inventories, Southern Plains Network*, in order to evaluate the completeness of the inventories, the strategies employed and the involvement of the Natural Heritage Programs. This review should take place no later than September 15, 2004.

*Funding.* NRC funding for the I&M program will be managed via the NR-PRO program. Funds will be distributed to the network per the network annual work plan. All I&M funds will be strictly accounted for and applied only to I&M activities approved by the BOD. In general, I&M funds will not be used for existing park positions and projects. Exceptions may be made where providing temporary salary and travel support is advantageous to meeting network work objectives. Funds contributed by parks, other NPS programs and sources that are used for I&M related work will be tracked and reported. Travel funds will be made available to members of the BOD, TC and Scientific Panels as available; however, parks are encouraged to cover their own travel costs when possible.

*Data Management.* Data management is an active process requiring continuous maintenance and a high degree of attention to detail. Under the I&M Program biological data management will be standardized across all SOPL parks and will comply with national data standards where applicable. The SOPL Data Manager will work with all network parks in developing a multi-year data management plan to ensure that biological spatial, tabular and bibliographic data are comparable and of high quality. It is envisioned that data repositories will be centralized, but available to all network parks. Data management responsibilities will be shared between network and park staff.

The basic goal of the NPS biological I&M program is to provide park managers with comprehensive scientifically based information about the nature and status of selected biological resources in an easily useable form. The network will place a high priority on the use of new technologies to ensure that data are easily accessible and useable.

Data management for I&M activities will conform to the philosophy that integrity, security and availability of current data sets are high priorities. All data will be certifiably accurate and be associated with metadata that describes (1) the purpose of the data, (2) the history of when, where, why, and how the data was collected and by whom, and (3) all changes and additions to established datasets.

*Communication and Information Sharing.* Open communication and information sharing will be emphasized in all network activities. BOD members are encouraged to participate in the work of

the TC. The Network Coordinator will keep BOD and TC members and others apprised of pertinent developments relating to I&M. The Network Coordinator is responsible for maintaining the administrative record of the SOPL Network at his/her duty station, with a back-up copy kept with the IMR I&M Coordinator.

*Supervision and Administrative Support.* Staff hired for the SOPL Network will be supervised and administratively supported as determined by the BOD. Administrative support, not to exceed 5% of personal services costs, will be provided by the Network to parks hosting I&M positions. Guidance on administrative procedures can be found in Attachment C.

*Budget.* Each year the SOPL Network Coordinator, with the assistance of the TC, will prepare a budget to be approved by the BOD for the travel, per diem, and any other costs associated with the conduct of meetings. These costs will be summarized in the Annual Work Plan.

*Monitoring Plan.* A monitoring plan that identifies the management and scientific issues facing each park, the vital signs to be monitored, where they will be monitored, and why they will be monitored shall be prepared by the TC and approved by the BOD. In addition, the monitoring plan will specify the overall sampling design, staffing plan, and data management strategy.

*Partnerships.* The Network I&M program may evolve to include other land and resource managers (e.g. Federal, State, or Tribal) in the Southern Plains Network area. The Monitoring Plan will look into the advantage of including non-NPS partners on the network BOD. In no case will this be done without unanimous approval of the BOD as well as approval by the Intermountain Region Associate Regional Director of Resources and Science.

#### **IV. General Provisions**

*Term of Charter.* This charter will remain in effect throughout the duration of the NPS I&M Program.

*Amendments.* Any signatories, BOD members or TC member may propose changes to this charter. Proposed amendments will be considered at a meeting of the BOD within 60 days of receipt of the proposal by the BOD chair. Any change will be in the form of an amendment that must be approved by the BOD, and will not take effect until all signatories have agreed to and signed – electronically or by hard copy - the amendment.

*Periodic Review.* The signatories and/or BOD will review this charter at least every three years to assess its adequacy, effectiveness, and continuing need.



## **V. Attachments**

*Attachment A.* Memorandum from Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, “New Park/Network Monitoring Program: Vision and Implementation Plan.” October 13, 2000.

*Attachment B.* Assignments to SOPL Board of Directors.

*Attachment C.* Memorandum from Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, “Policies Concerning Administrative Charges to Inventory and Monitoring Funding,” November 30, 2001 (with forwarding memorandum from Director, IMR).

**V. Approval Signatures**

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Superintendent, Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument &  
Lake Meredith National Recreation Area

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Date

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Superintendent, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site &  
Sand Creek National Historic Site

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Date

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Superintendent, Capulin Volcano National Monument

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Superintendent, Chickasaw National Recreation Area

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Superintendent, Fort Larned National Historic Site

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Date

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Superintendent, Fort Union National Monument &  
Pecos National Historical Park

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Date

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Superintendent, Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park

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Superintendent, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

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Date**VI. Concurrence**

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Inventory and Monitoring Coordinator, Intermountain Region

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Date